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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Kathryn Honey
Executive Headteacher
Dovecot Primary School
Grant Road
Liverpool
Merseyside
L14 0LH

Dear Mrs Honey

Short inspection of Dovecot Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 26 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 July 2014.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. You and your deputy headteacher's recent appointments have strengthened the leadership of the school and brought about stability and a positive ambition following a period of turmoil. You and your deputy have a clear and passionate drive to provide educational excellence for your pupils. This vision and this commitment are shared by staff and governors.

You have swiftly established positive relationships with staff who are motivated to support change and move the school forward, and with parents and carers who value your leadership. You have a secure and accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of your thorough systems of checks, including frequent observations of teaching and scrutiny of pupils' work. From this, you and your other leaders have devised and implemented appropriate and effective plans and actions to bring about improvement. These actions have led to a rapid rise in academic standards. This is particularly evident in the current progress pupils make from their starting points and is supported by the 2018 results. The results of the 2018 end of key stage 2 assessments show pupils' progress was well above the national average in mathematics and writing and was average in reading. Additionally, your consistent high expectation of teachers has resulted in better-quality teaching in nearly all classes. The effective promotion of pupils' behaviour and well-being has ensured that pupils feel safe in school. They develop very positive attitudes to learning. As a result, the school is a calm and vibrant learning haven, of which the community is rightly proud.

Only a few parents responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View. However,

nearly all those parents who did respond, including those who spoke with me at the start of the school day, shared their overwhelming support for the school. This is exemplified by the comment, 'The school is a fantastic community. The teachers go above and beyond for pupils. The new head teacher has created a happy and productive environment for the children, and we'd highly recommend the school to anyone in the area.'

Pupils who spoke with me were polite and courteous. They hold staff in high regard and would strongly recommend the school to others. Pupils said they liked the challenges they were set, particularly in mathematics. They also like the many opportunities that they have to participate in sporting and other educational activities. This was illustrated by the comment, 'Every year expectations get "well" higher! We never sit still because there are always new challenges to do.'

Since your appointment, you have acted tenaciously to improve the quality of teaching. Your good use of carefully chosen professional development has allowed teachers to develop their knowledge of high-quality mathematics teaching and implement effective changes to the wider curriculum to promote pupils' knowledge and understanding at greater depth. Furthermore, you have made good use of links with other schools to allow teachers and subject leaders to develop their knowledge and understanding well and learn from the sharing of best practice. You provide appropriate additional support for teachers to develop their practice, such as support from mentors. As a result, the quality of teaching is typically good. However, some teachers' use of questioning to probe in depth pupils' understanding is not as strong.

Staff in early years have a good knowledge and understanding of effective strategies that promote children's learning because of the training they have received from independent educational consultants. As a result, the quality of teaching has improved and the progress that children make from their starting points is good. The proportions of pupils who attain a good level of development have risen swiftly since your arrival and is now much closer to the national average.

You have resolved the area of improvement identified at the last inspection regarding the promotion of pupils' vocabulary. You ensure that the curriculum is carefully designed to effectively promote pupils' reading skills and breadth of vocabulary. Pupils typically receive good-quality teaching that models a rich vocabulary. Pupils' vocabulary improves considerably as they progress through the school and they become more confident and able to discuss the technical reasons for their choice of words because of the quality of teaching they receive.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and governors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are of a high quality and that they are fit for purpose. Well-trained staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding, including that relating to online safety. They implement the school's policies relating to safeguarding diligently and are vigilant about the potential risks pupils may face. Appropriate checks ensure the suitability of staff and governors to work with children. Safeguarding records are appropriate and meticulously kept by the committed

and knowledgeable pastoral support officer, who evaluates safeguarding records frequently to identify any trends of concern. They effectively share information with parents and appropriate authorities to ensure pupils' safety. Governors ensure that appropriate monitoring and filtering arrangements are in place for the school's internet connection.

Inspection findings

- In addition to evaluating the effectiveness of the school's culture of safeguarding, the inspection focused on a small number of key lines of enquiry. These lines of enquiry focused on the quality of teaching in the school, the quality of the governing body's checks on the effectiveness of the school and the quality of information that they publish for parents on the school's website. The final line of enquiry examined the impact of leaders' actions relating to promoting pupils' attendance and punctuality.
- The quality of teaching, including that in early years, is good. Typically, teachers and teaching assistants have secure subject knowledge and high expectations across the curriculum, which they use well to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. This was exemplified in English teaching in upper key stage 2. Here pupils were encouraged to broaden their vocabulary and understanding of language by exploring the use of a range of synonyms to avoid direct quotation of key words when answering questions that require empathy with the author's choice of words. Additionally, the use of carefully considered choices of songs are used skilfully by committed teachers and teaching assistants to effectively promote 2-year-old children's social skills, vocabulary and communication skills.
- Reading, including phonics, writing and mathematics are taught well by knowledgeable staff who effectively promote pupils' vocabulary and their understanding of the sounds that letters make. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points. Writing activities are frequently linked to other subjects, and teachers seize opportunities that give pupils the chance to write with real purpose. For example, in Year 6 pupils wrote eloquent and persuasive letters about the provision of free milk to school children as part of a study about healthy diets in science. Pupils systematically develop their knowledge and understanding of mathematical concepts and become confident in the application because of the quality of teaching they receive.
- Most teachers use questioning well across the curriculum, but on occasions they miss opportunities to use questions to probe pupils' knowledge and understanding at greater depth. Typically, teachers ensure that the tasks they set for pupils are carefully matched to their abilities so as to present the correct levels of challenge. However, work in pupils' books shows that on occasions, particularly in key stage 1, this is not the case. Here some of the work is too difficult for some pupils to access easily. At other times, most-able pupils do not receive enough challenge to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Leaders are aware of this issue and have appropriate plans in place to deal with it.
- My second line of enquiry focused on the effectiveness of the governing body's monitoring of the school and the accuracy of the information it provided for parents on the school's website. Governors have a secure and detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school because of the quality of the information they

receive. Governors check the accuracy of the information they receive by frequently visiting the school on purposeful visits. They feed back their findings to their respective committees or the full governing body. Governors use this information to hold leaders closely to account for the impact of their actions. However, governors' systems to check the accuracy of the information they share with parents on the school website have not been as effective. Some policies were out of date and did not reflect the information found in copies of policies held in school. Additionally, the published assessment information 'sold the school short' about its achievements.

- My focus on attendance arose because the proportion of pupils being persistently absent is high and well above the national average for primary schools nationally. Many pupils are absent for good reasons, linked to medical or mental health issues.
- Leaders monitor attendance diligently in order to identify any emerging trends of concerns. They report their findings to governors frequently and are held to account for the impact of their actions.
- Attendance is promoted well through a wide range of activities. These include snakes and ladders posters, designed by pupils, that are used in all classes to celebrate attendance, class and individual awards and pupils' and family rewards for good and improved attendance. Leaders appropriately challenge any unauthorised absences through appropriate communications with parents and a range of formal sanctions. Consequently, most up-to-date attendance information held in schools shows that the proportion of pupils who are persistently absent is diminishing rapidly. However, despite the school's best efforts, a small group of families do not ensure that their children's education and welfare benefit from the good education provided by this school.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should:

- ensure that the information shared with parents that is published on the school's website is accurate and kept up to date
- enhance the outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring that teachers enhance their use of questioning to probe and develop pupils' knowledge and understanding at greater depth
 - ensuring that all teachers in key stage 1 consistently provide learning opportunities that are well matched to children's needs and challenge their thinking.

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

Yours sincerely

John Nixon
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

I met with you, your deputy headteacher, headteacher and the school's pastoral support officer. I held meetings with the school's special educational needs coordinator and subject leaders of mathematics, English, religious studies, art, science and physical education. I also met with a group of governors, the chair of the governing body, and with the local authority officer who works with your school. I spoke with pupils during lessons and around the school and listened to readers from key stages 1 and 2. I took account of the conversations I had with parents and the information contained within the responses to the online questionnaires for parents, Parent View. There were no responses to the online questionnaires for staff or pupils.

I visited classrooms with you to observe pupils' learning, looked at their work in books, at work on display and at records of their learning. I scrutinised the school's self-evaluation and development planning and other policies. I looked at provision for safeguarding and evaluated the impact of the school's policies, procedures and records to keep children safe, including while they are online.