

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Ms Claire Lamb
Headteacher
Warley Infant School
Bleakhouse Road
Oldbury
West Midlands
B68 9DS

Dear Ms Lamb

Short inspection of Warley Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 5 March 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.

Based on the evidence gathered during this short inspection, I have identified some priorities for improvement which I advise the school to address. In light of these priorities, the school's next inspection will be a full section 5 inspection. **There is no change to the school's current overall effectiveness grade of good as a result of this inspection.**

You took up post as the new headteacher in the term after the school's previous inspection. Since this time, there has been significant staff turnover, including changes to the leadership team. It has only been recently that staffing has begun to stabilise. This staffing upheaval has contributed to a lack of consistency in the quality of teaching and has had a detrimental impact on pupils' outcomes. Several strengths that were identified at the time of the previous inspection, including high standards in reading and mathematics, and the skilled support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), have not been maintained. The quality of teaching has not been consistently strong over time to enable all pupils to achieve well.

In 2016, the proportions of pupils at the end of key stage 1 attaining the expected standards in reading, writing and mathematics were exceptionally low. However, since this time, there has been a year-on-year increase in all three subjects, and they are closer to the high standards that pupils attained in the past. In 2018, the proportion of pupils at the end of key stage 1 attaining at least the expected standard in reading was in line with the national average. Achievement in writing, an issue identified at the time of the previous inspection, remains a relative weakness, although it is improving.

Leaders' work to improve provision in the early years, an area for development highlighted at the previous inspection, has paid dividends. Changes to assessment, more clearly defined roles for support staff and improvements to the quality of teaching have resulted in children making better progress in their learning. Over the last four years, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of children attaining a good level of development. For the last two years, this has been just above the national average.

Just over a year ago, the school began to turn a corner. You, ably supported by a new deputy headteacher and acting on advice from external consultants, embarked on a revised school improvement strategy. Leaders' actions started to address more successfully issues with the quality of teaching and aspects of leadership and management. You have been supported well in this drive for improvement by the governing body. Also, due to concerns about falling standards, the local authority has rightly intervened to check on the school's work and provide appropriate, intensive support. You and your leaders have been, and continue to be, receptive to this support and challenge. As a result, the rate of improvement has gathered pace and weaknesses are being addressed with a greater sense of urgency than in the past.

Leaders have a clear understanding of which aspects of the school's work need developing so that pupils can achieve the best possible outcomes. The school development plan is fit for purpose and includes appropriate milestones that leaders, governors and the local authority use to determine how well the school is progressing. However, leaders' plans to improve the teaching of writing are not focused sharply enough to address the specific barriers to pupils' achievement in writing. This is slowing the rate of improvement and contributing to the achievement gap between reading and writing.

Last academic year, leaders revised the school's curriculum to bring about more rigour in topic work and raise pupils' levels of engagement in their learning. Leaders have been successful in this quest. Beyond the core subjects, staff work hard to excite pupils through well-planned activities. Pupils are keen to share their work and talked to me enthusiastically about what they have been learning. For example, pupils explained how they used an app to produce a computer-generated bar chart about different types of litter found in a local library garden. In classrooms throughout school, there is a real buzz of excitement, where pupils enjoy their learning and teachers make the most of their naturally inquisitive nature. This leads to them achieving well in non-core subjects, including science and history.

Parents and carers have mixed views about the school. Understandably, parents have been concerned about the significant number of staff changes in recent years. Others say that communication between home and school is not good enough, and that information about school events are sometimes given at short notice. A few parents raised concerns about bullying. However, inspection evidence found that incidents of bullying are rare, and are dealt with effectively by leaders. Pupils also state that they feel teachers deal well with any unkindness or bullying. Many parents also speak favourably about the school and believe that communication is

good and that their children enjoy school, feel safe and benefit from exciting learning opportunities. At present, leaders and governors do not have a clear understanding about the reasons why some parents feel unhappy with aspects of the school's provision.

Safeguarding is effective.

Keeping pupils safe from harm is a high priority for the school. Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. Staff receive a range of appropriate training, so they are well equipped with the necessary knowledge to spot any signs that a child may be at risk of harm. Staff are vigilant and report any concerns without delay. Leaders of safeguarding take prompt action, involving other agencies when necessary, to secure the best support for the child. In instances where leaders have felt that the response from children's services has been unacceptable, they have been tenacious in pursuing their concerns until appropriate action is taken.

Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding about how to keep themselves safe because of well-planned learning experiences. They speak confidently about how to protect themselves when online and understand the importance of sharing any concerns with a trusted adult. Leaders ensure that pupils' mental well-being is promoted well.

Inspection findings

- Pupils with SEND do not make as much progress as they could, because planned support is not consistently well matched to meet their specific needs. Teachers do not take sufficient account of advice and recommendations from special needs professionals when designing programmes of work for pupils with SEND. In the last year, leaders have improved systems for identifying pupils with SEND. Teachers' earlier identification means that specific programmes start earlier to help pupils make better progress.
- A new special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) took up post in September 2018. They have already established a broad overview of SEND provision across the school, although they have not yet monitored and evaluated the impact of the quality of different interventions. This means that leaders do not know what impact individual programmes of work have on a pupil's achievement.
- Leaders take account of the views of parents when determining and evaluating pupils' objectives for their personal programmes of learning. However, the school's SEND information report does not contain all the required details. This means that parents do not have access to the full range of information available about the school's SEND provision.
- Leaders have already started to take steps, through training and development, to improve teachers' general knowledge and understanding about supporting pupils with SEND. This is helping teachers to plan appropriate programmes of work, but there is still further work to do.
- Despite leaders' efforts to improve the teaching of writing, pupils' achievement at

the end of key stage 1 continues to lag behind that of reading. Leaders' strategies to secure better outcomes in writing have not had enough impact over time. This is because leaders have not identified, with enough precision, the specific barriers to learning. For example, a significant minority of pupils have poor pencil grip. This causes some pupils physical discomfort and discourages them from writing. Another example is in relation to spelling, where too many pupils lack essential spelling skills to write confidently accurately.

- Leaders have been successful in developing pupils' writing skills across the curriculum. The quality of pupils' writing in their topic books is generally of a higher standard than that seen in English books. This is because teachers are sometimes less clear about the specific learning intentions in English lessons. Teachers' work to help motivate boys to write has proved successful. Teachers try to make the context for writing equally engaging for boys as well as girls. This has helped to develop boys' positive attitudes to writing.
- Teachers often organise writing tasks for pupils of differing levels of ability. However, the most able pupils are still seldom challenged in their writing to think hard and write with greater complexity. Sometimes, teaching approaches that are beneficial for the majority of pupils hold back the most able pupils from achieving as well as they could.
- Pupils' attendance is usually good, and this has typically been the case over time. However, last academic year saw a fall in pupils' overall attendance. Also, and of greater concern, was the increase in the proportion of pupils persistently absent, in particular disadvantaged pupils. The persistent absence rate was significantly higher than the national average.
- Leaders have tackled attendance issues robustly. The effective work of those responsible for managing attendance, along with externally commissioned services, have helped to halt the decline in attendance and reduce the proportion of pupils persistently absent.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of writing enables all pupils to make the best possible progress
- the provision for pupils with SEND meets their specific needs and enables them to achieve well from their individual starting points
- they seek to understand parents' concerns about the school, and act to resolve these promptly.

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

Yours sincerely

Tim Hill

Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I held discussions with you and the deputy headteacher about the school's self-evaluation, development plan and current priorities. I met with leaders responsible for safeguarding to discuss the school's arrangements for keeping children safe. I held a discussion with the key stage 1 phase leader regarding pupils' writing. I spoke to some staff about safeguarding procedures. I held a meeting with two governors, including the vice-chair of the governing body. I also met with the school's SENCo to discuss provision for pupils with SEND. I observed teaching and learning in key stage 1, jointly with school leaders. I spoke to children in early years and pupils in key stage 1 about their work and looked at a wide range of English books and topic books.

I evaluated a range of documents, including the school's self-evaluation, school development plan, records relating to pupils with SEND, governors' documentation and records related to safeguarding. Parents' views were considered through the 53 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, 23 free-text comments and 44 responses from the school's own recent questionnaire to parents. I spoke to parents on the playground at the start of the school day. The opinions of staff were gathered through the seven responses to the staff survey.