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Mrs Julie Fardell
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Dear Mrs Fardell

Short inspection of Cherry Oak School

Following my visit to the school on 12 March 2019 with Tracy French, 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 outstanding 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 outstanding as a result of this inspection.**

Since the last inspection, there has been a change in the leadership of the school, including alterations to the governing body. In 2017, the executive headteacher was appointed and she has led several effective school improvement initiatives, through a time of change, whilst maintaining support for both pupils and families. There has been a large increase in the number of pupils on roll and there has been a significant building project. The appointment of the head of school, in September 2018, added to the leadership capacity of the school to create a small but strong senior leadership team.

Senior leaders demonstrate a united vision for the school. Leaders have high expectations for their pupils and are developing pathways through the curriculum to ensure that pupils have rich experiences which provide the support they need and prepare them for the future. Senior leaders are improving many aspects of leadership, such as improving the effectiveness of the monitoring of teaching and learning. However, more time is needed to evaluate the impact of these changes.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. All parents who spoke to inspectors and those who responded to the parent survey have nothing but praise

for the school. Parents comment that the school 'caters for their child's needs holistically', 'staff are warm and friendly' and leaders have gone 'above and beyond for the family as a whole.' This praise is well deserved as all pupils are shown great care and support by all leaders and staff. Inspectors observed a high standard of pastoral care throughout the inspection.

There is a very clear and strong emphasis on communication. Systems and practices to support pupils with communication difficulties are well established and highly effective. The school uses many approaches to support communication and the pupils select their own preference in how to communicate. Many pupils have very little spoken language, but at every opportunity they are encouraged to use the tools available to communicate with others.

At the last inspection, you were asked to ensure that data analysis routinely includes the attainment data for children in the early years, in order to give the senior leadership team an even sharper view of progress and achievement across the school. You have now done this. However, school leaders still have to improve the accuracy of assessment and its use across the school.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders and the governing body ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The school stores safeguarding documentation electronically and in an organised and systematic way to ensure that information can be accessed efficiently.

Adults in school demonstrate that they are committed to keeping pupils safe and this is evident at the beginning and end of the school day. Many pupils are transported by bus to school and systems around arrivals and departures of pupils are highly effective. The arrival and departure of pupils is managed exceptionally well; this works like clockwork.

Staff and the governing body receive safeguarding training and ongoing updates from leaders. Staff know whom to go to and what to do if they have any concerns. Parents feel that their children are safe in school and pupils are clearly happy to come into school in the morning and feel safe in the care of those who are supporting them.

All staff feel that pupils are safe and that behaviour is well managed. Pupils who have difficulty managing their emotions are well supported and often visual communication tools are used to help pupils understand how they are feeling. Pupils respond well to the system that the school uses to encourage pupils to behave appropriately. Behaviour throughout the school is good.

Inspection findings

- Over time, assessment has not been sufficiently accurate and there remains inconsistencies in the assessment information gathered. Currently there are too

many different approaches to assessment. Leaders know that this needs to be addressed, and as result, leaders are trialling a new whole-school approach to assessment in order to streamline the current system. The implementation of this approach is in its infancy however and it is not yet possible to evaluate the effectiveness of this system.

- Inspectors also evaluated the effectiveness of the mathematics curriculum during this inspection. We found that most teachers use practical mathematical equipment well to support good progress. The school has developed a 'lesson on a trolley' which provides teaching assistants with all the equipment and resources needed to deliver or support group teaching of mathematics. This is an effective approach that supports teaching assistants' practice.
- 'Sing and Solve' is another approach, developed by the school, to incorporate music and song into its curriculum to engage pupils. Where this works well, pupils are highly motivated and concentrate for extended periods of time. Children clearly enjoy their learning.
- Some inconsistencies in the quality of teaching of mathematics remain. Where improvements are needed, resources are used ineffectively and the pitch of the lessons does not sufficiently take account of the ability of the pupils. As a result of monitoring, leaders have identified some weaknesses in teaching and are addressing these inconsistencies
- Parent workshops in mathematics have also been well attended and well received by parents. Parents appreciate the support that they receive from the school to support their children at home. Parents' commentary is included in the school's new approach to assessment, which provides strong evidence of parental involvement in their children's learning.
- Leaders spend their pupil premium funding effectively to support disadvantaged pupils. They have used the funding to support pupils in thoughtful and well-planned ways. Leaders have used the fund to respond to specific pupils' needs and provide speech and language therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. Inspectors observed an effective physiotherapy session which was planned by a trained physiotherapist but delivered by a member of staff. This session supported a pupil with complex needs and showed high expectations of both pupil discipline and concentration. In addition, the session demanded a challenging range of movements and the pupil made good progress towards their targets.
- The school has also been able to use additional funding to provide enrichment to the curriculum by working in partnership with external providers. During the inspection, inspectors observed a yoga session which supported the pupils' development, both emotionally and physically. Pupils were well supported by additional staff so that they concentrated, were calm and contributed positively to the session. Inspectors also observed a drama-based session which was highly effective and encouraged pupils to develop their communication skills. Each of these sessions are typical of what pupils experience when teaching is of high quality.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- ensure that assessment throughout the school is accurate and can be used effectively, by streamlining assessment processes and moderating assessment judgements
- use accurate information about pupils' achievement more effectively to plan activities that are matched to pupils' individual needs.

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

Yours sincerely

Susan Lowry
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, inspectors met with the executive headteacher and senior leadership team. They visited classes across the school, observed lessons and looked at available information about learning within the classroom and through an online assessment software package.

Inspectors scrutinised documentation relating to safeguarding, self-evaluation and the school improvement plan.

The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing body, including the chair of the governing body and spoke to the school improvement partner on the telephone. The views of parents were evaluated through the 19 responses to 'Parent View', Ofsted's online survey and inspectors talked to parents informally at the start of the day. Inspectors also used the 38 responses to Ofsted's staff survey to establish staff views. There were 10 responses by pupils to an online pupil questionnaire.