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Mrs Tracey Pizl
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Dear Mrs Pizl

Short inspection of Fatfield Academy

Following my visit to the school on 30 April 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 May 2016.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following your appointment in September 2017, you have acted swiftly to address inconsistencies in teaching. You have built a strong new leadership team, working in partnership with governors and the academy trust. Your school self-evaluation is accurate and insightful and underpins your school improvement plan. Your vision to provide a nurturing, inspirational environment is evident throughout school and shared by all members of the school community.

Parents and carers are strong advocates of the school. Responses to Ofsted's Parent View and conversations I had with parents before school were overwhelmingly positive. They say that communication is good and the school has a real community feel. A number of parents commented that staff are approachable and listen to any concerns. Parents talk enthusiastically about the curriculum and the enrichment activities which you provide, for example regular class visits linked to topics, and the extensive range of after-school clubs that you offer. Parents feel welcome in school and well informed about their children's progress. A view typical of many was, 'I particularly value the opportunities for parental engagement through workshops, performances and invitation afternoons.'

Pupils are very proud to belong to Fatfield Academy. They feel a real sense of ownership and that their ideas are listened to. They talk enthusiastically about recent developments in the outdoor area, after the school council had identified playtime as an area for improvement. For example, you have recently provided pupils with supervised access to the forest area where they enjoy environmental art

and den building. In 2018, the success of the school council was recognised when they achieved the Sunderland Young Achievers Award. Pupils feel involved in shaping their own learning and appreciate the opportunity to contribute their own questions at the beginning of a new topic, which they later review with their peers. They enjoy a number of responsible roles in school, for example the anti-bullying champions who have their own base where pupils may visit and share any concerns.

Governors have an accurate and informed view of the school. They are supportive and recognise the pivotal role that you and your senior leaders have in driving school improvement. They talk positively of an increased stability in staffing since your appointment and a significant improvement in staff morale. Link governors meet regularly with senior leaders to monitor school improvement priorities. They are not afraid to challenge, for example when disadvantaged pupils' attainment remained below that of other pupils.

The previous inspection report challenged school leaders to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently strong enough to allow all pupils to excel. Following the inspection, school experienced a period of instability and pupils' results dipped in 2017. You have introduced a comprehensive monitoring programme to check that standards of teaching are consistently high. You and your senior leaders regularly observe teaching, check pupils' workbooks and review assessment data to ensure that pupils remain on track to succeed. Where teaching is less than good, you take decisive action to secure improvement. Teachers appreciate regular feedback, which they describe as supportive and developmental. You provide staff development through whole-staff training, linked to school improvement priorities and individual coaching. Key stage 2 results improved significantly in 2018 and the proportion of pupils attaining the expected standard in reading, writing and mathematics was above average. However, you have correctly identified that a greater proportion of pupils should be attaining the higher standard in reading and mathematics.

At the last inspection, inspectors also asked school leaders to improve the quality of teaching in mathematics, to make sure that pupils are able to justify and explain their reasoning in mathematical problem-solving. You have taken this recommendation seriously and accessed support from the local authority and the trust. You have purchased new teaching materials and teachers have been trained to model high-quality mathematical reasoning. Your mathematics leader has introduced reasoning question prompts which are displayed in classrooms to support and deepen pupils' verbal responses. When I looked at pupils' workbooks with senior leaders, it was evident that pupils have the opportunity to regularly apply their mathematical knowledge in problem-solving and reasoning tasks. The previous inspection report also identified teachers' questioning as an area for improvement. When we visited classrooms together, I observed teachers using questioning to challenge pupils' thinking and stretch their understanding. For example, in a key stage 1 class, effective questioning enabled pupils to apply prior learning on fractions to describe movement and turns.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that the arrangements to keep pupils safe are effective and fit for purpose. Appropriate, rigorous checks are made on the suitability of adults to work with pupils. Staff receive the training they need on child protection and safeguarding matters. Safeguarding records are detailed. Leaders' actions and logs demonstrate their effective engagement with other agencies when pupils are at risk of harm.

The positive relationships and respect that exists between adults and pupils are evidence of your work to ensure that pupils feel cared for and safe. The curriculum supports pupils to stay safe and the pupils I spoke to have a good understanding of internet safety. They know why it is important not to share personal details online, the dangers of social media and why it is important to report concerns.

You correctly evaluate behaviour as a strength of the school. Pupils are polite and talk confidently to visitors. On the rare occasion where poor behaviour leads to exclusion, you have taken action to ensure that pupils get the support they need.

Inspection findings

- Historical data shows that the proportions of pupils who attain the expected standard on exit from Reception, key stage 1 and key stage 2 are broadly in line with national averages. However, the proportion of pupils who achieve greater depth, particularly for disadvantaged pupils, is low. In 2018, no pupils eligible for the pupil premium grant achieved the higher standard in writing or mathematics in Year 2 or Year 6. I wanted to explore what actions school leaders are taking to ensure that the most able pupils are being suitably challenged in their learning.
- You have worked alongside your mathematics and English leaders to deliver staff training to develop subject knowledge and ensure that all teachers understand the national expectations for pupils to achieve greater depth. New assessment materials have been implemented, which is making it clearer for teachers to plan more challenging lessons and track the progress of your most able pupils. In the majority of pupils' workbooks which I looked at with senior leaders, increasing levels of challenge are evident. Where teachers have not challenged pupils effectively, this has been identified and actions are being taken to bring about improvement.
- Your pupil premium strategy statement clearly identifies barriers to learning for disadvantaged pupils, such as low self-esteem and limited access to social and cultural experiences. You track disadvantaged pupils individually and closely monitor their progress in reading, writing and mathematics. Funding is allocated to bring about improvements in teaching for all pupils and provide additional targeted support where gaps in learning have been identified. Pupils' workbooks support the school's own assessment data and show that disadvantaged pupils are currently making better progress. However, historical inconsistencies in the quality of teaching mean that attainment for disadvantaged pupils in key stage 2 is still not strong enough.

- Pupils' progress in mathematics at key stage 2 was below the national average in 2016 and further declined in 2017. In 2018, there was a marked improvement in the proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard; however, this did not represent good progress from pupils' previous starting points. We discussed historical inaccuracies in teachers' assessments at key stage 1 and how this has had a negative impact on published information of pupils' progress at key stage 2.
- Looking at pupils' workbooks and observing in lessons demonstrated that pupils have regular opportunities to practise their basic skills and develop their mathematical fluency. Children gain a good foundation to mathematics in the early years and develop a curiosity and interest in number. Reasoning questions are introduced in the Reception class as children learn to explain their mathematical thinking. One most able child could record one million accurately and understood the concept of infinity. Learning is very practical, using objects which children learn to represent in pictures and diagrams before progressing to more abstract concepts. The mathematics leader has developed this approach throughout school.
- Finally, I focused on writing, where there has been a three-year improvement in pupils' progress at key stage 2. The proportion of pupils achieving the expected standard and greater depth is above average. A new approach to the teaching of writing focuses on one text type each half term to enable pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding. Writing is linked to a quality text which pupils enjoy sharing in class. In one lesson we observed in key stage 1, pupils were able to select appropriate adverbs, nouns and adjectives to describe a setting from the class novel. The classroom environment was rich in vocabulary which was displayed in a pirate role play area, which further added to pupils' engagement. Pupils were able to recall earlier work on conjunctions and were confident in defining the term with examples. In key stage 2, we observed younger pupils who could write an expanded noun phrase and use the correct technical vocabulary to describe their word choices.
- Pupils' workbooks show evidence that the most able pupils are developing a writers' flair and they are able to apply their skills in subjects other than English. For example, in Year 4, pupils have written an extended account of Viking raids linked to their history topic. Pupils take a pride in their work and your high expectations of presentation and handwriting are maintained throughout school.
- Your new approach to phonics, grouping pupils by their stage of development, is securing spelling from Reception and key stage 1. You have identified spelling as an area for improvement in key stage 2 and pupils are beginning to apply these skills in their independent writing.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- teachers consistently challenge the most able so that the proportion of pupils achieving the higher standard at the end of key stage 2 in reading and mathematics increases to be at least in line with national outcomes

- they continue to work hard to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils in reading, writing and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body and the chief executive officer of the multi-academy trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Sunderland. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Andy Jones
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I discussed the work of the school with you, your acting deputy headteacher and senior leaders. We conducted a learning walk in Reception, key stage 1 and key stage 2. I completed a whole-school book scrutiny in writing and mathematics with your senior leaders. I met with a representative from the local authority and the chief executive officer of your multi-academy trust. I also met four governors, including your chair. I took into account school documentation, including monitoring records, self-evaluation and school improvement planning, assessment information, and policies and information posted on the school's website. I listened to six pupils read and spoke with pupils from key stage 1 and key stage 2. I spoke with five parents and considered the 10 parental responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.