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5 June 2019

Miss Janine Harries
Headteacher
Old Town Infant School and Nursery
Green Road
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Dear Miss Harries

Short inspection of Old Town Infant School and Nursery

Following my visit to the school on 21 May 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 your predecessor school was judged to be good in July 2013.

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 staff create a warm welcome for children and their families. Your commitment to put 'children at the heart of everything we do' is reflected in your drive to continue to make improvements to the school.

You have high expectations and expect the best for children. You are not afraid to challenge any weaknesses in the quality of teaching. You support staff well, providing them with good-quality feedback. Teaching is strong as it is based on an accurate assessment of pupils' needs. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points. These starting points are sometimes very low. In the Nursery classes, staff closely check that activities enable children to form positive attitudes to learning. Most children remain at the school, moving on up to the Reception classes. Others join from several pre-school settings.

Last year, a high proportion of children in the Reception classes with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) needed extra support to achieve well. Staff gave children plenty of time to settle at the start of the year. This lost some valuable time to teach early reading and writing skills. During the year, children made significant progress; however, a high proportion still needed to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for successful learning in Year 1.

You looked at pupils' needs carefully and made changes which created an

individualised approach to learning. Together with your leadership team, you introduced flexible teaching arrangements, aiming to ensure that pupils who need to make more rapid progress are supported well to do this.

Teachers plan activities that enable pupils to gain knowledge and move forward quickly. Teaching assistants are well briefed in providing extra guidance for specific pupils. Activities are interesting and relevant. Staff respond positively to pupils' contributions and, as a result, pupils are confident and lively. More pupils in Year 1 now have the early reading and mathematical skills they need than at the start of the year.

Pupils' books show that they use ideas from their reading to write confidently. However, some do not form letters correctly. This weakens some pupils' progress in writing. Although pupils work diligently in lessons and show interest in their learning, some pupils' books are not presented well, showing a lack of pride in their work.

Most parents are extremely positive about how teachers help their children to achieve well. A typical comment was, 'My daughter has transitioned from Nursery all the way to Year 2. Each year, she has been challenged, cared for and moved on by her excellent teachers.'

Pupils are also aware of the high expectations. In discussion, pupils explained that all learning time is important. When asked about how the school could improve even further, they pointed out that they would like to practise their reading, writing or mathematical skills during registration times.

Safeguarding is effective.

Leaders ensure that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose and that the culture of safeguarding is strong. All pupils who gave a view in an online survey said that they feel safe at school. Staff build positive relationships with parents and take time to understand challenges they may be facing. Many parents expressed views about how much they appreciate that staff do all they can to help parents who are experiencing difficulties or trauma.

The designated safeguarding lead keeps safeguarding high on the agenda for staff and there are frequent updates during meetings. As a result, staff understand their responsibilities and know how to report any concerns. Governors and the trust also understand their responsibilities to promote and check safeguarding procedures. Recruitment checks are secure.

Inspection findings

- Together, we explored how you support pupils, particularly disadvantaged boys, to make better progress in reading. Improving the teaching of reading has been a key priority this year as outcomes were just below national averages in Year 2 last year.
- You introduced new approaches to teaching reading. The focus is on gaining vocabulary and understanding challenging texts. Teachers plan lessons that help pupils to explore the meaning of words and phrases together as a class. For example, in a Year 2 class, pupils were helped to understand what 'crept' meant by discussing different situations and how you might move in response to them. In addition, more emphasis is given to ensuring that disadvantaged pupils read more often with adults. As a result of the focused teaching and from reading more frequently, disadvantaged boys now make better progress and are catching up well with their peers.
- We also looked at how well staff manage behaviour across the school. Pupils are courteous and polite. They move around the school to their different sessions calmly and without fuss. They enjoy their playtimes and say that staff deal with any issues quickly. Leaders ensure that there are strategies to support pupils who need extra space and time to manage their emotions. Because of this, there are few exclusions.
- In the past, pupils' attendance has been too low. This is an area that trust leaders have been particularly involved in, offering their expertise and experience to ensure that attendance improves. New tracking systems introduced this year have helped you to locate precisely what the attendance issues are, and which families need extra support. As a result, far fewer pupils have very low attendance and, overall, attendance is now at the national average.
- However, you are not complacent; you and your leadership team continue to reflect on improvements being made using advice from the school's improvement partner, and the trust's chief executive officer.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- the teaching of phonics and early writing starts sooner so that children in the Reception classes gain the skills and knowledge they need by the end of the year
- more pupils across the school present their work well, developing good letter formation and handwriting
- all opportunities during the day are used for pupils to practise their skills.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Tonwen Empson
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I had several meetings with you and other senior leaders. I also met four governors including the chair of the governing body. In addition, I had a meeting with the chief executive officer for the Harbourside Learning Partnership Multi-Academy Trust. I also had a telephone conversation with the school's improvement partner.

The 41 responses and free-texts to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered alongside views taken from parents at the start of the school day. The 27 responses to an online survey for staff were taken into account.

We looked at learning taking place across the school. I talked to pupils and staff at lunchtime. I observed the English subject leader talking to a group of pupils about their reading. Together with leaders, I looked at a sample of pupils' books.

I scrutinised a range of school documents including the school's own evaluation and development plan. I also looked at documents related to attendance and safeguarding.