

7 June 2019

Mrs Dawn Wilson
Headteacher
Hill Farm Academy
Foster Road
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West Midlands
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Dear Mrs Wilson

Short inspection of Hill Farm Academy

Following my visit to the school on 22 May 2019 with Linda Brown, 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 good in April 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Following its previous inspection, the school has been through a period of turbulence. Since your appointment 12 months ago, initially as acting headteacher and recently as headteacher, you have brought stability and vision. You command the confidence of pupils, parents and carers.

Together with your senior leadership team, you have a clear and persuasive vision for the education you want the school to provide for its pupils, and especially the values that should underpin all that the school does. These values are evident throughout the school, for example in displays, in lessons and across the curriculum. Pupils readily talk about values such as resilience, celebration and tolerance. They understand what these mean for them as pupils of Hill Farm Academy.

Leaders know the school and its local community well. They plan all that the school does based on the needs of its pupils. For example, the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are explicitly and carefully planned to provide pupils with '101 experiences' that broaden their horizons, raise their aspirations and prepare them for life after primary school.

Warm and respectful relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils like and trust their teachers and teaching assistants. Pupils enjoy learning. They are articulate when talking about what they are learning. They are polite, well mannered and welcoming. Pupils are proud to belong to the school.

At the previous inspection, leaders were tasked with improving some aspects of the school. These included making sure that the most able pupils are challenged in their work, giving pupils more opportunities to write, improving the arts in school and developing the roles of all leaders.

The school has responded well to these areas for improvement. Teaching now provides appropriate challenge for pupils of all abilities, including the most able. Pupils in all years write regularly and at length in many subjects. Provision for the arts is much improved. Leaders at all levels are effective in their roles.

Safeguarding is effective.

This area is well led. All policies and procedures are clear and fit for purpose. Leaders have ensured that staff are trained thoroughly about safeguarding issues. All training is tailored to the school's context and issues that are pertinent to Coventry. For example, staff have received training in issues such as radicalisation, e-safety and online exploitation. Consequently, staff are alert to the signs that pupils might need extra help and readily report to leaders any concerns they have. Leaders deal with concerns quickly, involving outside agencies when needed to ensure that pupils and their families get the right support. Records relating to child protection are detailed, well organised and securely stored.

Because staff understand pupils' needs well, they provide a wide range of high-quality extra help in school. For example, leaders have identified that the school has many 'young carers', who provide care for their parents at home. Staff organise several groups where these pupils come together and share their thoughts and worries in a caring and supportive environment.

All pupils who spoke with inspectors said that they feel safe and well cared for in school. They told inspectors that bullying is rare and that they trust the school's adults to deal with any bullying or other problems that occur.

Inspection findings

- The inspection's first focus area was on the teaching of English. Effective teaching is now in place in all years. There is a high degree of consistency of approach from teachers, for example in the teaching of phonics and in how they provide pupils with helpful feedback about their work. Improving pupils' writing has been a particular focus in recent years and this has proved successful. Pupils of all ages and abilities write well. They write regularly, independently and at length in most subjects. Most pupils spell and punctuate accurately. Handwriting is a strength of the school. Pupils of all abilities write clearly using cursive script. Teachers' work to improve pupils' vocabulary is also proving successful. New words are recorded and explained in all subjects, and pupils use them in their writing.
- Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge that they use effectively to plan activities that are well matched to pupils' different abilities. They use questioning well to check on pupils' knowledge and to deepen pupils' understanding of their

work. Teachers and teaching assistants provide effective extra support for pupils who need it. For example, the school has many pupils who speak English as an additional language. Some speak little English when they join the school. Staff regularly assess how these pupils' English is developing. Teachers and teaching assistants provide skilful support in class, and as a result these pupils make strong progress from their starting points.

- The second area that inspectors looked at was the school's curriculum. Leaders have designed a curriculum to meet the needs of Hill Farm's pupils. It is designed to encourage pupils to develop a love of learning, to provide them with a wide range of cultural experiences and to develop their basic skills, especially in literacy and numeracy. A set of values underpins everything that the curriculum offers. Although only in its first year of implementation, the curriculum is already proving successful in several regards. It is well planned to develop pupils' knowledge in most subjects. Pupils thoroughly enjoy their learning and find the curriculum engaging and interesting. They are becoming enthusiastic, inquisitive learners who benefit from a very wide range of experiences. For example, pupils in Year 4 spoke excitedly about the 'space dome' that had been in school recently and how they had seen what would happen 'if the sun exploded'. More needs to be done to fully embed the new curriculum. Although effective, the quality of teaching in some subjects is weaker than others because of teachers' lack of expertise in those areas.
- The inspection's next focus area was on early years provision, especially for children's language and communication development. Throughout the early years, the curriculum has a strong focus on children's speaking and early reading and writing. Phonics is taught well and children use their knowledge confidently to sound out and spell words. Staff encourage children to talk and they do so with enthusiasm. Consequently, children are surrounded by and immersed in language each day, from the moment they arrive until they leave. Staff have high expectations of children, expecting them to answer questions in complete sentences. This helps all children to make strong progress and is especially beneficial for those who speak English as an additional language. Assessment is accurate, so staff know how well children are doing and those areas where more attention is needed. They use this information well to plan children's next steps in learning.
- Leaders are working hard to involve parents in their children's education. Parents told inspectors that they value the parents' forum that has been set up this year and the opportunity it gives them to share their views of the school with staff. In the early years, leaders regularly invite parents into school to share learning experiences with their children. On 'Fantastic Fridays', children and their parents take part in activities such as 'going on a bear hunt'. Leaders have provided information sessions for parents about understanding how phonics is taught in the school.
- The final area on which inspectors focused was attendance. Published information about the school shows that attendance has declined slightly in each of the last two years. In 2017/18 attendance was below the average for similar schools nationally. The school's own summary attendance information for

2017/18 contains errors because leaders had not included pupils who left the school during the year. This omission led to an overgenerous view of attendance for 2017/18. These errors had not been spotted by leaders, governors or the trust board until inspectors pointed them out. Because of their inaccurate view of attendance, leaders have not made improving attendance a sufficiently high priority for the school. Because governors and trustees had not checked the information presented to them effectively, they have not held leaders to account for attendance as well as they should.

- Staff work hard to support individual pupils who do not attend regularly. They know these pupils and their families well, including the factors that affect their attendance. Staff employ a range of strategies to encourage these pupils to attend. However, they do not use information about attendance as well as they could to evaluate the impact that these strategies are having.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- improve attendance by ensuring that leaders, governors and trustees:
 - compare the school's attendance summary data to that published nationally and so have an accurate view of how the school's attendance compares with other primary schools
 - give sufficient emphasis in their improvement plans and strategies to improving pupils' attendance
 - carefully evaluate the impact that strategies to improve pupils' attendance are having, amending them when necessary
- continue to develop the curriculum so that all subjects are as well taught as English and mathematics.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the board of trustees and the chief executive officer (CEO) of the Castle Phoenix Multi-Academy Trust, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Coventry. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Alun Williams
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, we met with you and other leaders. I met with the CEO of the Castle Phoenix Trust and spoke over the telephone with the chair of the local governing body. No other governors were available to meet with us. Together with

leaders, we visited most classes to observe teaching and learning and to speak to pupils about their work. We talked with pupils in lessons, at breaktime and at lunchtime. We scrutinised several documents, including those relating to self-evaluation and improvement planning and records of safeguarding and child protection. We talked with several parents as they dropped their children off at the start of the school day. Inspectors considered the seven free-text comments recorded on Parent View during the inspection. There were insufficient responses to Parent View for other responses to be considered. There were no responses from staff or pupils to their Ofsted online inspection questionnaires.