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Ms Donna Atkinson
Headteacher
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Dear Ms Atkinson

Short inspection of Balfour Infant School

Following my visit to the school on 4 June 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 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Your ethos of continuous improvement is reflected in leaders' work, with training for staff lying at the heart of your strategy for school improvement. The school's community is united in ensuring that pupils receive the best learning opportunities and the highest levels of care. One parent summed up the views of many, saying: 'This is a friendly, welcoming and inclusive school. The staff work hard and I hope they are proud of all they achieve.'

Pupils are proud of their school. Their good attendance reflects their desire to make the most of all the school has to offer them. Pupils behave well and are curious and interested in what they learn. The strong relationships between pupils and adults create a positive atmosphere for learning. Pupils report that they get on well with their friends and trust adults to help them resolve any problems they encounter. They demonstrate high levels of respect for people from faiths and cultures that are different to their own. One pupil explained: 'It doesn't matter where you come from in this school. It's interesting to learn about different people.'

You know your school well and are ambitious for its continued improvement. The governing body provides senior leaders with effective support and challenge. Governors have a clear understanding of how their skills and experience can contribute to school improvement. Strong leadership results in pupils making good progress during their time at the school, effectively equipping them for their transition to junior school at the end of Year 2.

You have successfully addressed the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. School improvement priorities are now identified through accurate self-evaluation. Subject leaders are clear about how their work contributes to the overall aims of the school. Improvements in the quality of teaching have resulted in increasing proportions of pupils reaching greater depth in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of key stage 1.

Your careful use of coaching and mentoring has empowered leaders to increase the pace of the development of provision since the last inspection. Staff have benefited from carefully devised training opportunities, resulting in greater confidence and skill in the way they fulfil their roles. This is illustrated in the strength of provision for pupils who have additional needs. Mental health first aid sessions are having a positive impact on pupils' well-being and a range of interventions are used effectively to support pupils' learning. Teachers are proud to work at the school. They are grateful for the support they receive and the consideration that leaders give to their workload.

Safeguarding is effective.

The leadership team has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose. The promotion of effective safeguarding has a high priority throughout the school. You have ensured that staff receive regular and appropriate training and you frequently review its impact. Consequently, staff know what actions to take if they have concerns related to pupils' safety or welfare. When concerns are raised, leaders act quickly and work well with external partners when required. Governors contribute effectively to the strong safeguarding culture by keeping their own training up to date and regularly checking on the school's systems and processes.

The curriculum is designed to include many opportunities for pupils to learn how to stay safe. They can identify people they would talk to if they have a concern or worry. Pupils feel safe and secure in school and are involved in decisions that contribute to their safety and welfare. For example, pupils have helped to redesign the playground so that they can play different games together safely.

Inspection findings

- At the start of the inspection, we agreed to look at specific areas of the school's work, including: how effectively leaders and governors use additional funding to support the progress of disadvantaged pupils; how effective leaders have been in improving the quality of teaching and learning; and how effective the curriculum is in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics. You have made sure that additional funding is used effectively to provide specific support for disadvantaged pupils. They benefit from personalised interventions delivered outside the classroom by well-trained, skilled staff. Assessment information is used carefully to identify pupils' next steps in learning and these are the focus for their individual support.
- Teachers know their classes well and ensure that disadvantaged pupils receive extra support within lessons, when required. They have high expectations of pupils and

work hard to overcome barriers to learning. The support that pupils receive is particularly effective because of adults' questioning skills, resulting in pupils improving their understanding of new concepts.

- Leaders regularly evaluate the impact of their use of the additional funding on disadvantaged pupils' outcomes. This results in support being adapted in a timely way if pupils' progress dips. Governors have improved their methods for reviewing the way the pupil premium is spent, but recognise that they could go further in evaluating its impact beyond pupils' academic progress.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good and particularly strong in the early years. Your work to ensure that children in the early years get off to the best possible start has been successful, reflecting your clear vision and the support and challenge you have provided to staff. The emphasis you have placed on the development of children's speech and language skills can be seen throughout the curriculum. Children benefit from provision that is engaging, exciting and challenging. During the inspection, children were excited to discover that the troll from 'The Three Billy Goats Gruff' had been seen at the school. They could choose to complete a variety of activities, including writing their own versions of the story and making food for the troll from the herbs that they were exploring the properties of. Adults used these opportunities to develop children's speech, language and vocabulary skills effectively.
- In key stage 1, teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and hold high expectations of pupils. Assessment information is used effectively to ensure that the pitch of learning is correct. Teachers check pupils' understanding within lessons by asking questions and using responses to refine explanations so that pupils make good progress. However, leaders recognise that some tasks that pupils complete independently do not challenge them to achieve as well as they could.
- Leaders have developed a curriculum that is broad and balanced. Pupils can talk about their learning across a range of subjects and confidently recall what they have learned in previous years. The teaching of art is a strength. All year groups take part in the National Gallery's 'Take One Picture' programme. Paintings produced by pupils in Year 1 show very well-developed skills. They are justifiably proud of their work.
- Middle leaders are effective in securing improvement in the subjects they lead. They use monitoring information to identify aspects that require further development and take effective action. For example, in geography, teachers have been encouraged to explore a wider variety of methods for pupils to record their learning, rather than just through written accounts. However, this is not yet fully embedded and the quality of pupils' recording varies across the curriculum.
- Leaders have developed clear plans for the curriculum to ensure that all learning is interesting and engaging. The progression of skills and knowledge is planned so that pupils build on these over time. In Year 2, pupils were observed keenly investigating the life cycles of frogs, following a visit to the school's pond. Pupils were able to relate what they were learning to the work they had done in Year 1 on how plants grow. Assessment information is beginning to be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. However, this is not yet fully embedded or used to adapt the curriculum when necessary.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- they build on improvements in the quality of teaching and learning by making sure that teachers set tasks that consistently challenge pupils
- they continue to develop middle leaders so that the ambitious vision for the curriculum is fully implemented.

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

Yours sincerely

James Freeston
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, senior leaders and representatives of the governing body. I also spoke with a representative of the local authority. I visited lessons across the school to observe teaching, speak with pupils and look at work in their books. I spoke with pupils about their experience of school and observed them at lunchtime. I analysed the 26 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents and carers, Parent View, including 21 free-text comments. I considered the 29 responses to the staff survey. A range of documents were examined, including: the school's self-evaluation; the school's improvement plan; and documentation relating to safeguarding, pupils' attendance and the curriculum.